



Globalization as a Policy: Initiation and Implementation of the *Segyehwa* Policy in South Korea, 1993–2003

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the formulation and implementation of the *Segyehwa* (globalization) policy in South Korea from 1993 to 2003. The policy was initially formulated and implemented by the Kim Young-sam government (1993–1998). The article argues that while much of the focus, when it comes globalization, tends to emphasize economic issues, the main goal of the state initiated *Segyehwa* policy was to enhance the South Korea's global position in both economic and political terms. Taking a qualitative empirical approach the article analyses the historical context of the goals, in particular economic and political, that were set by the Kim government, as well as the outcomes of these policies. While the *Segyehwa* policy was, and remains, the target of significant opposition, with some sectors within society feeling threatened by the policy, the purpose of the policy, to significantly increase South Korea's global position was not only continued by the Kim Dae-jung government, that succeed the Kim Young-sam government, but also by most of the governments since 2003.

“Globalization is the quickest way to build the Republic into a first-rate nation in the coming century.”

President Kim Young-sam, January 1995.¹

“My fellow Koreans, Korea is the tenth largest economy in the world. It is incumbent upon us to take on a greater role befitting our stature as a global leader.”

President Yoon Suk-yeol, May 2022.²

Introduction

On 6 June 2023 the Republic of Korea (hereafter South Korea) was for the third time elected to be a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council.³ This followed upon its participation in the G7 Summit held in May in Hiroshima, Japan. It was also not the first time that South Korea had been invited to a G7 summit, as it had participated as a guest at the 2008 and 2009 Summits, and it had been invited as a guest country to the G7 Summit scheduled to held in 2020. However, while that summit had been canceled, South Korea did in 2021 participate as one of four guest countries in the June Summit hosted by British government. By 1990 South Korea only had diplomatic relations with

146 countries, but the establishment of diplomatic relations with the island state of Niue, that was the result of President Yoon Suk-yeol hosting the inaugural Korea-Pacific Islands Summit in Seoul in May 2023, brought that number up to 192. The election to the UNSC, the participation in the 2023 G7 Summit, and the hosting of the Korea-Pacific Islands Summit was by the South Korean government seen as very important moments in the country's foreign policy history as it was taken as a clear indication of the increased importance of the country in the global arena leading the country to become a “global pivotal country.”⁴

South Korea is one of the few countries that has gone from being an overseas development aid recipient to becoming a donor nation. It acquired OECD membership in 1996, and then joined the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) in 2009 (Hermanns, 2013, p. 72). South Korea has also since 1993 participated in a number of United Nations Peacekeeping Operations. It was in July 1993 that the country approved the first deployment of troops, the Evergreen Unit, to a UN Peacekeeping Mission (UNSOM II Mission in Somalia), and since the passing of the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations Participation Act by the National Assembly in December 2009 it has increased its

¹ See Kim Y. S. (1997).

² Yoon Suk-yeol, “Inaugural Address” 10 May 2022. <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20220510005900315>. Accessed 30 January 2023.

³ It had also been elected as a non-permanent member of the UNSC in 1996 and in 2013.

⁴ See, for instance, *Korea Joongang Daily*, 20 May 2023; *The Korea Times*, 9 June 2023. Yoon Suk-yeol had already before being inaugurated as president in an article in the *Foreign Affairs* magazine stated his intention of making South Korea a “global pivotal state.” See Yoon (2022).

participation in a variety of UN Peacekeeping Missions.

We have during the last decades have seen a compelling increase in the global presence of South Korea, and this is not only in regards to trade and other economic activities. In fact, the country has also to a significant degree expanded its global political presence since the mid-1990s. This is also indicated by the increase in the country's ranking in the globalization index published by KOF Swiss Economic Institute. According to the KOF overall globalization index South Korea in 1993 had a score of 54.73, but this had increased to 78.08 in 2020, and it is not only, as this article also will argue, when it comes to economic factors that we have seen a significant increase in the country's KOF Index score, but also in regards to political factors.⁵

Globalization in a South Korean context has received significant attendance, and it is in general recognized that the *Segyehwa* (globalization) policy introduced by the Kim Young-sam government in 1994 to enhance the global position of the country was not restricted to the changes sought in regards to the national economy, but that the policy also sought changes in social, cultural, and political factors (Ro, 1996). However, when it comes to investigating globalization as a policy in a South Korean context most of the focus has been on the impact of economic liberalization (Kim, 2014; Park, 1998). The emphasis has been on analyzing the impact that the globalization policy, introduced by the Kim Young-sam government, and continued by succeeded governments, that often included a re-labeling and some changes to the focus of the policy, has had on the flow of goods, services, and on the domestic economy in general (Gills and Gills, 1999; Machado, 2004; Yun, 2002).

It is, however, not only economic factors that have been the focus of inquiries into globalization in a South Korean context. Park (2022) has argued that the globalization policy introduced by the Kim Young-sam government, in connection with the financial crisis starting in 1997, did not only have significant an impact on economic factors, but also played a role in the socio-cultural changes that the country has gone through over the last decades even arguing that it has played a positive role in the rise of K-pop. Furthermore, John (2015, p. 43) argues that political factors played a critical role when South Korea was seeing globalization as an opportunity to become a *Seongjnguk*, or advanced country, and that the *Segyehwa* policy was a "top-down strategic plans" with the purpose of achieving that goal. However, Moon and Mo sees this goal not only having been impeded by "domestic political forces", but also argue that the promise by the Kim Young-sam government to turn South Korea into a "first-rate nation" eventually turned out to be an "empty promise" (1999, p. 410).

This article will in the following focus not only on economic factors, but will also argue that South Korea's indisputable significant global presence today, and the improvement in its ranking since 1993 in, for instance, the KOF globalization index, is the result of the formulation, and initial implementation, of the comprehensive state-led *Segyehwa* (globalization) policy by the Kim Young-sam government that, recognizing the linkage between, in particular economic and political factors, sought not only economic change, but also promoted the need for significant political and cultural changes in order to enhance the country's global presence. Furthermore, the article will assert that while the concept of the *Segyehwa* policy was formulated, and implemented, first by the Kim Young-sam government in 1994, the basic idea behind the policy, namely to enhance the global position of South Korea, focusing not only on economic and trade factors, has remained an essential part of government policy for the last three decades.

The article will start with brief discussion of the concept of globalization and then moves on to a detailed analysis of the background to the formulation of the *Segyehwa* policy by the Kim Young-sam government in 1994 analyzing the difficulties the Kim Young-sam government was faced with when it came to developing the *Segyehwa* policy as a coherent

concept. It will then move on to an analysis of the goals and means of the policy, focusing on economic and political factors, and argue that the negative reaction by the public to in particular the economic and trade factors of the policy played a significant role in the inability of the Kim Young-sam government to see many of its *Segyehwa* policy objectives being realized, but that many of these objectives also were on the agenda of the Kim Dae-jung government that succeeded the Kim Young-sam government in 1998. The article then investigates how the main objectives of the *Segyehwa* policy were pursued by Presidents Roh Mu-hyun (2003–08) and Lee Myung-bak (2008–2013), concluding that while there was less of an emphasis on enhancing South Korea's global presence, and more of a regional focus, during the Roh Tae-woo government, the Lee Myung-bak government had a vision of the creation of a Global Korea and pursued many of the objectives that were part of the original *Segyehwa* policy formulated by the Kim Young-sam government, and that this emphasis on using globalization to enhance the global position of South Korea is also an essential part of the policies pursued by the current (2023) president, Yoon Suk-yeol.

Globalization

The concept of globalization remains highly controversial and means so many different things to different people. At times it can evoke significant emotions, and there continues to be a lack of a clear definition that is acceptable to all (Rosenberg, 2007; Conley, 2000; Kim, 2000). In fact, while globalization, and the processes and policies that are part of it, have received significant attention not only from scholars, but also from policy makers, there is still no truly coherent or dominant theory of it, and the term seems to have become a broad concept able to encompass almost everything. That said, the debate, both the academic and the more public one, has largely tended to be dominated by two opposing views: proponents of globalization who see it as a way to enhance the quality of life not only in the advanced industrialized nations, that so far has benefited the most from globalization, but also as potentially giving the poorest countries a much needed opportunity to improve the quality of life of their citizens.

Opponents on the other hand see the consequences of globalization in largely negative terms as a threat to social stability, sovereignty, national identity, and potentially leading to a loss of state capacity (Rodrik, 1997; Bowles, 2020; Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2001). Ikenberry, for instance, sees increased participation in the global economy as coming with a "political price" with national governments having to accept that the potential benefits of increased participation in the global economy can lead to a "shrinking zone of politics" (1999, p. 150). In fact, an analysis of globalization policy must recognize not only that there is a linkage between economic and political factors, but also, as argued by Kim (2000), take into account that the globalization strategy adopted by the government, which must take into account potential negative public reaction, often will be decisive when it comes to the likelihood of reaching state policy objectives.

However, even though scholars and policy makers might not agree on how to define the term, or agree on the impact being positive or negative, there is a general consensus that globalization does not only affect the structure of a nation's economy, which has often been the focus, but that it also has an impact on culture, politics, and diplomacy. It has also been argued by some scholars that we, as a consequence of globalization, are seeing the separation between domestic and foreign affairs increasingly becoming vague (Held & McGrew, 2002; Moon, 1995). In addition, while globalization might not reduce the role of the state it does, as argued by the United Nations' Department of Economic and Social Affairs in its 2001 report on globalization, refine the state "given the pressures and responses it must give at the local, national and international levels" (p. 30).

Hence, whether we see globalization as something positive or negative we have to accept that we are dealing with a complicated political, social, and cultural process, and that any policy in regards to

⁵ See <https://kof.ethz.ch/en/forecasts-and-indicators/indicators/kof-globalization-index.html>. Accessed 29 January 2023.

globalization initiated by a state must go beyond an emphasis on the prospective economic benefits. In fact, it must be recognized that states are often forced to rethink not only foreign policies and strategies, but also domestic policies in particular in those areas that are the most impacted by globalization, and that, as argued by Held and McGrew, “contemporary globalization is reconstituting or re-engineering the power, functions and authority of national governments.” (2002, p. 126). That globalization would have an impact on the power and functions of national governments, was also realized by government leaders. For instance, in Southeast Asia we from the mid-1990s saw, according to Chittiwatanapong (1999, 75), the leaders of the ASEAN member countries seeking to enhance collaboration to help the states in the region deal with the globalization challenge, with President Fidel V. Ramos of the Philippines in 1998 also arguing for the need of a comprehensive state policy on globalization as it had not “removed the need for strong and efficient states, particularly in the new countries”. (Ramos, 1998). Government leaders of advantaged countries also accepted that the globalization would have a significant impact on the state. President Bill Clinton during his time in office (1993–2001), for instance, repeatedly emphasized that globalization was a pervasive force, and he saw an urgent need for the state to adapt to it. (U.S. Department of State Archive, 1999; The Clinton Whitehouse, 2001).

When it comes to making sense of globalization as a concept and process this article will lean on the work done by Rosenau (1996) and Held et al. (1999). Their definition of globalization focuses on the multi-dimensional aspects of intensifying global interconnectedness that has an impact on not only economic issues, but on all areas of human relations and transactions, be they economic, social, cultural, environmental, or political. Furthermore, we need to recognize that the impact of globalization must be evaluated in a situation-and-actor-specific way, as outcomes, when dealing with the potential impact of globalization policies, to a high degree will depend on the respective resources, skills, and the strategic choices made by governments, as well as the present, or absence, of public support for these policies.

Segyehwa: The Formulation and Initial Implementation, 1993–98

It was after his participation in the November 1994 APEC Summit in Indonesia that President Kim Young-sam announced a globalization policy with the explicit purpose of making the country an advanced nation. Among the changes promoted by the president in his speech was an emphasis on what he referred to as a “new diplomacy” that was seen as essential when it came to making the country an advanced nation. It was not the first time that Kim Young-sam had mentioned the necessity of engaging in a comprehensive reform of the country’s diplomacy. Already in the Spring of 1993 the president had introduced the “new diplomacy” policy. This policy included a focus on enhancing globalization, diversification, multi-dimensionalism[sic], regional cooperation, and a futuristic orientation seeking to significantly change the country’s diplomatic and trade relations through a policy of restructuring of the state (Korea Overseas Information Service, 1993; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1994, pp. 15–18). This perception of the need for a comprehensive restructuring of the state was partially the consequence of a significant drop in the growth rate of the economy. While the average GDP growth in the period of 1987–1991 had been above nine percent, the growth rate had dropped to under six percent in 1992, the year which saw Kim Young-sam win the presidency, and the growth rate would remain below seven percent in his first year (1993) in office. However, as indicated by Fig. 1, with the introduction of the globalization policy in 1994, the country did see a brief period (1994–95) where the economy did experience an improvement in the growth rate, before it then decreased to five per cent in Kim Young-sam’s last full year (1997) in office.

It was not only the growth of the economy as such that had seen a decline in the years leading up to the inauguration of Kim Young-sam. Trade as a percentage of GDP had also, as indicated by Fig. 2, during

the Roh Tae-woo government (1988–1993) decreased, and the Kim Young-sam government would also see an increase in trade, in particular exports, as an important part of its national restructuring attempt.

The Concept of Segyehwa

When it came to the need of reforming the state it was not the first time that Kim Young-sam had raised this issue. Already in 1992 he had promoted some of the ideas that would later form part of his *Segyehwa* policy (Kim, 2001). And in late 1993, immediately after his inauguration, he had announced his *Sinhanguk Changjo* (creation of a new Korea) policy with the purpose of getting rid of what he termed *Hangukpyung* or the Korean Disease. This was followed by the *Kukjehwa*, or Internationalization discourse, which then soon morphed into the *Segyehwa* policy. As this attempted transformation took place at a time when the president was under pressure for failing to stem corruption in his administration, even though the *Segyehwa* policy went beyond the reforms that had been part of the *Kukjehwa* policy by including the expansion of social welfare for quality of life improvements, the new policy was still greeted with a certain amount of cynicism by many. One reason for the cynicism was that the president’s speech after the APEC Summit introducing the *Segyehwa* policy did not include any significant details of the policy nor a clear indication of how it would be implemented. There had been no detailed discussion of what kind of policies should be pursued prior to the speech by the president after the APEC Summit, and the way in which the new policy was introduced was yet another sign of the president’s emphasis on shock-therapy. Even among senior members of the government there seems to have been some confusion after the president’s speech when it came to what he actually meant by the term *Segyehwa*.⁶ In addition, as the president at this time, as mentioned above, was under criticism for having failed to deal in a comprehensive way with the accusations of corruption in his administration, the new *Segyehwa* policy, in particular because of the lack of detail when it came to how to define the concept of *Segyehwa*, what the policy objectives actually were, and how the policy was going to be implemented, was immediately after the announcement on the receiving end of significant criticism by academics, and also by civil society groups, and the government would see it as essential to come up with a clear definition of the concept and its objectives.

This was not the first time that a South Korean government had argued that comprehensive policy changes were needed due to the potential impact and opportunities of globalization. Already in 1989, during the Roh Tae-woo presidency, a Presidential Commission on the 21st Century had been established with the purpose of creating “long-term policies and strategies” that would enhance the country’s ability to deal with the significant changes “entering South Korea from the outside” (Presidential Commission on the 21st Century, 1994, p. 110). However, while the Roh government recognized that global changes would have a significant impact on the nation, there was no consensus on what should be the proper government response to these changes. This was, as mentioned, also the case after Kim Young-sam announced his *Segyehwa* policy upon conclusion of the APEC Summit where the president emphasized the need for enhancing the country’s global role. However, the Kim government realized quickly that a more detailed conceptualization of the purpose, and focus of the policy, was needed in order to generate public support, because while the government until then had focused on arguing that the policy had been initiated with the intent of striving for excellence in a number policy areas, that the government saw as essential for the future of the nation, there was significant confusion, not only among the public, but also within the administration, on how the concept of *Segyehwa* was different from the *Kukjehwa* (internationalization) policy that the Kim government had promoted in the first months in office. Hence, recognizing that public

⁶ On this issue see, for instance, *Korea Newsreview*, 14 January 1995, p. 28.

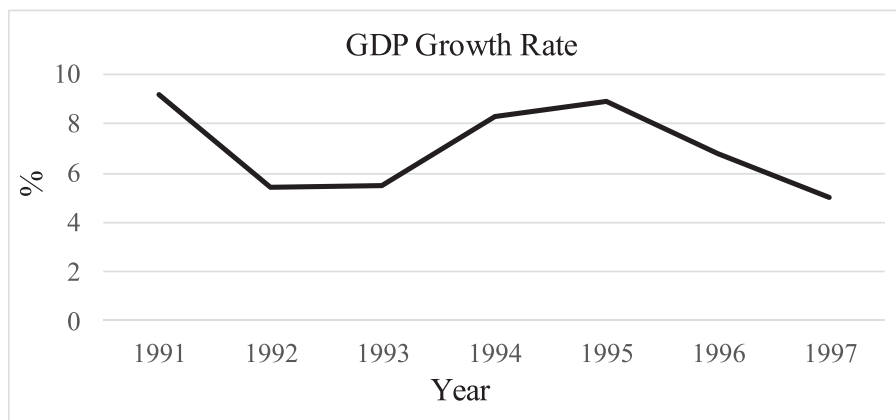


Fig. 1. GDP Growth Rate, 1991–97. Source: Tonggyecheong (1999, p. 717).



Fig. 2. Trade as a Percentage of GDP. Source: <https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=2&country=KOR>. Accessed 2 August 2023.

support was essential the government sought to explain in more detail what it actually meant by the term *Segyehwa* arguing that while internationalization was an outdated concept having mostly focused on economic factors, *Segyehwa* was a policy that would go beyond a focus on enhancing the competitiveness of the national economy and also seek significant improvements in political, social, economic, and cultural factors that would lead the country to be ready for the 21st century (Korea Overseas Information Service, 1996). The government was here focusing on the state taking a leading role. In contrast to the general assumption that globalization would lead to a reduction in state control over national policy the *Segyehwa* concept, as promoted by the government, emphasized the central role the state was going to play in achieving the objective of seeing the country enhance its global presence. The focal point was on a number policy objectives that were seen as critical by the government when it came to reaching that goal. Among these policy objectives were (1) turning South Korea into a first-rate nation; (2) seeking the rationalization of all aspects of national life; (3) ensuring a national unity above class, regional and generational differences; (4) furthering the Korean national identity as the basis for successful achievement of globalization; and (5) generating a sense of community with all humanity (*Ibid.*).

Seeking public support the government sought to give the president's ideas some substance, and a newly formed *Segyehwa Ch'ujin wiwŏnhoe* (Committee for the Globalization Policy), chaired by Prime Minister Lee

Hong-koo and Kim Jin-hyun, a former Minister of Science and Technology, met in January 1995 and then announced that the committee would work on globalization in sixty-five areas, with twelve of them considered priority areas (Korea Herald, 22 January 1995).⁷ The president met with the committee in late January, and at the meeting stated that the strategy for national development would be aimed at

"achieving the following five principal goals: First, globalization is to meet global standards of excellence in all areas. Second, globalization calls for the rationalization of all aspects of national life. Third, globalization calls for unity. Fourth, globalization must be underpinned by Koreanization. Fifth, globalization requires an enhanced sense of community with all mankind."⁸

This was followed up by a speech given on 23 March 1995 where the president then sought to give the public more details regarding his vision of *Segyehwa*. The president in this speech argued that globalization was a "global trend" and that South Korea was in the middle of an era of a "borderless global economy." This meant that the country would have to prepare itself for "boundless" global competition. In order to live up to this challenge the government claimed that *Segyehwa* would of necessity mean a "rationalizing all aspects of life" and a "sweeping transformation of society" (*Segyehwa ch'ujinwiwŏnhoe*, 1995). The President presented *Segyehwa* as the second stage of his reforms, with the rooting out of corruption as the first stage, but he apparently had given no serious consideration as to how these reforms could be implemented, and although some strategies and reasonable goals would be formulated by the Globalization Committee in its 1995 plan and some policies would start to be enacted, there would still be a general lack of consensus among politicians and government officials on the exact meaning and purpose of the *Segyehwa* policy.

That said, while there were no comprehensive details in place yet when it came to how the stated goals of the president should be achieved, the main purpose with introducing the *Segyehwa* policy was clearly to change the country using a strategic plan in order to meet the challenges of globalization as defined by the government. This would not only entail changes to the structure of the economy, but also include a focus on political factors in order to ensure, as the globalization committee argued, that the policy would allow the nation to actively

⁷ In addition to Lee Hong-koo, Kim Jin-hyun, head of the Korea Economic Daily, vice-premier Hong Jae-hyung, and Minister of Economy Kim Teok, the committee consisted of an additional twenty-three people from academia such as Seoul National University professor Kim Se-won and Seo Kyung-seok, a leading member of the Citizens' Coalition for Economic Justice, as well as people connected to the business world. For a complete list see Kim (2001, pp. 22-23).

⁸ The president is quoted in Korea Overseas Information Service (13 February 1995).

adapt to the changes taking place globally. An important aspect of this was, according to the committee, that the government was intending to promote a type of development that would avoid repeating the failures of the past.

In order to achieve this goal of improving the country's global position, it was seen as essential to enhance economic efficiency by promoting autonomy, competition, and liberalization which, if implemented fully, would have meant an end to the developmental state that had played a significant role in the economic development of South Korea since the mid-1960s (Amsden, 1989; Luedde-Neurath, 1988). However, while the policy did include stated social, cultural, and political goals, the main emphasis, as with the earlier *Kukjehwa* policy, continued to be on the improvement of the national competitiveness, and the government still saw it as its job to promote, and even direct, the development of the national economy. So, while the Kim Young-sam government on the one hand sought to embrace globalization, it also sought to retain some of the interventionist powers of the capitalist developmental state. These powers would later, as South Korea sought WTO membership, come under significant pressure (Bowles, 2020; Wade, 2010).

While coming under increasing criticism for corruption within the administration, the president continued to emphasize the importance of globalization, and although the government in the beginning had used the term globalization in its statements published for an international audience, it would within weeks after the introduction of the policy increasingly start to use the Korean term *Segyehwa* not only in statements issued for a domestic audience, but also in statements issued in English. The reason was that it pretty quickly had become clear to the government that how the concept, process, and focus of globalization was defined internationally was not necessarily in line with the policies that the government wanted to implement.

The Implementation, 1994–1998

To enhance the chances of the seeing the *Segyehwa* goals achieved the government saw a significant improvement in the economic performance of the country as essential, and in order to increase the chances of achieving that goal the president wanted to see a shrinking of the central government both in budgetary and interventionist terms, emphasizing the desire to see the growth rate rebound, and the economy did grow at a higher rate in 1995 than in 1994 (8.9 percent versus 8.3 percent). To further improve the competitiveness of the economy the government in December 1994 announced an important administrative re-organization with the purpose of creating a small, but highly efficient, state structure that would be capable of carrying out the tasks of globalization (Korea Overseas Information Service, February 1995). This goal of a comprehensive administrative re-organization of the state would continue to be seen as a top priority.

One of the most important targets in the administrative re-organization announced in December 1994 was the influential Economic Planning Board (EPB) that had been established by the Park Chung-hee regime after the military coup d'état in 1961. The EPB had, until the reforms were initiated, been led by the Deputy Prime Minister, and it was staffed by a group of highly capable bureaucratic elites, mostly insulated from societal pressures and short-term political whims, and had, together with the Economic Secretariat at the Blue House, formed the institutional foundation of the Capitalist Developmental State (CDS) in South Korea for more than three decades. In fact, it had, as argued by Richard Luedde-Neurath, "acted as an overlord planning ministry" (1988, p. 95). However, by the late 1980s the EPB and the Ministry of Trade and Industry were increasingly in conflict when it came to gaining the attention of the president, and the EPB had in this period progressively shifted its focus in a more regulatory than developmental direction. Nonetheless, the EPB was still compiling the national budget and through that also had retained significant policy influence, but the administrative reforms pushed by the Kim Young-sam

government included a merger of the EPB and the Ministry of Finance into the Ministry of Finance and Economy creating in the words of Gills and Gills a "super-agency" (2000, p. 37). Even though this reorganization saw the establishment of a Fair Trade Commission as an independent organization (it had earlier been part of the EPB), it was mainly a regulatory agency and, although powerful when backed by a strong president, it would, as Kim Young-sam increasingly became a lame duck by 1995, see many of its attempts at regulating big business over-ruled by other agencies.

While an important focus of the re-organization of the state had been to create a highly efficient structure that was a smaller burden on the economy government expenditure as a ratio of Gross National Income (GNI) would continue to increase from 26.5 percent in the 1992, the year before Kim Young-sam was inaugurated, to 32.8 percent in the year (1998) his term ended showing that the goal of decreasing government expenditures, which had been an important part of the state re-organization plans, had failed (Tonggyecheong, 1999, p. 417).

In addition to the merger of the EPB and the Ministry of Finance a new policy planning committee with a focus on globalization issues was established in the presidential office. This committee had a number of sub-committees dealing with issues such as policy planning, administrative reform, educational reform, and science and technology. Members of these sub-committees were drawn from government ministries, research institutes, universities, business, and also from civil society organizations, and the focus would increasingly be on ensuring consistent policy implementation which had become a serious concern partly as a consequence of the high turnover rate among high-ranking members of the government.⁹

While coming under increasing criticism for corruption within the administration, the president continued to emphasize the importance of *Segyehwa*. In his new year's address in January 1995, for instance, he emphasized that he saw *Segyehwa* as a comprehensive policy embracing political, economic, cultural, and social issues, and the president would also in his 1996 new year's speech spend significant time again trying to explain in more detail the concept of *Segyehwa* and his vision of creating a "first-rate nation." While finally admitting that in 1995 not everything had gone according to plan, he nevertheless argued that the government had "accomplished a lot amid difficulties in many areas" (Korea News-review, 6 January 1996, p. 6). He also made it clear in his 1996 new year speech that, even though there was increasing resistance the government would continue its *Segyehwa* policy during 1996 and that the focus would be on the following areas: the first goal was comprehensive reform of the financial sector. This basically meant an opening of the financial sector to foreign corporations, a move that by many was seen as premature, and opposed both by domestic banks and civil society, but which the government pursued nonetheless in order to gain OECD membership which it had applied for in March 1995.

The second goal corporate reform with the government seeking to end the stranglehold the large conglomerates had on the economy, while at the same time accepting that the continued growth of the economy was heavily dependent on these conglomerates. In this the government actually did receive support from civil society groups, who saw the large conglomerates as personal fiefdoms long overdue reform. Civil society in South Korea had been severely suppressed during the Park Chung-hee (1961–1979) and Chun Doo-hwan (1980–1988) regimes. However, with the middle class having played a large role during the struggle for democracy in the late 1980s, the Roh Tae-woo period (1988–1993) did see an increase in the number, and activities, of civil society groups as the political environment became more permissive. That said, it was really first with the inauguration of Kim Young-sam in 1993 that the political environment opened up enough for a large and diverse number

⁹ By 1995 the president had replaced the nation's top economic policymaker, the deputy prime minister (and minister of the Economic Planning Board), three times, making an average tenure of less than ten months.

of civil society organizations to emerge, and the president did initially see civil society groups as partners in his intended transformation of society with several prominent members from civil society joining the Kim Young-sam government. However, with the start of the *Segyehwa* policy in 1994, and the government seeking to join the OECD, civil society groups became increasingly critical of the government's policies.

The third goal mentioned in the president's 1996 new year's speech was a labor reform with the purpose of making the labor market more flexible, and the government in beginning sought to include labor organizations in the planning phase of the reforms by establishing a Presidential Commission on Industrial Relations Reform in May 1996. The committee included representatives from the big conglomerates, the Federation of Korean Trade Unions (FKTU), and from the newly established, and at that time still technically illegal, Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU). However, not really surprising considering the contradictory interests of the parties involved, the negotiations in the commission soon stalled as the KCTU sought to legalize itself by demanding that multiple unions in the workplace be allowed, and by seeking to expand the legal political role of trade unions, while big business sought to retain the existing prohibition on multiple unions and political activities by unions. Unable to reach a compromise among the involved parties, the ruling party in the early morning of 26 December 1996 unilaterally passed a new labor law in the National Assembly. The new law would not allow multiple unions in the workplace until 2002, and it restricted labor unions right to fight for social and political purposes. Confrontation with the KCTU was unavoidable, and a national strike was declared that saw the mobilization of not only the KCTU and the FKTU, but also much of civil society as such. The assistance that the unions received from civil society groups in this fight for an improvement of labor rights was critical, and the government, faced with overwhelming resistance agreed to reopen the negotiations on the revision of the labor law, and the result of this was the passing of a revised labor law by the National Assembly in mid-March 1997.

The fourth, and final, goal mentioned in the president's 1996 new year speech was a comprehensive public sector reform focusing on making the public sector more streamlined and efficient. In addition, the president also emphasized the need to continue to encourage the shift from the corporate dependency on loans to encouraging foreign direct investments that had seen, as indicated by Fig. 3, a significant drop since 1989.

However, while the president in his new 1996 year's speech had promoted four comprehensive reform goals, and sought to deal with the criticism that the *Segyehwa* policy had faced, there clearly were not only continuing implementation problems, but also still issues regarding how the concept, and purpose, of *Segyehwa* should be understood. And while the government, for instance, did encourage FDI, and the country also saw an increase in FDI from 1993, the full-scale economic liberalization and opening of the domestic market, that many foreign businessmen and commentators saw globalization as entailing, was not a part of the government's policy.

As mentioned above South Korea had in March 1995 formally

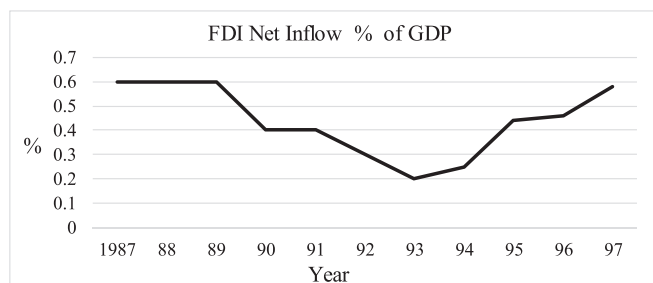


Fig. 3. Foreign Direct Investment (net flow of GDP), 1987–97. Source: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.KLT.DINV.WD.GD.ZS?locations=KR>. Accessed 3 August 2023.

applied for OECD membership, and it was one of the reasons for pushing the reforms through as quickly as possible as the government saw OECD membership as essential in achieving the *Segyehwa* goals (Office of the President, 1997, p. 132). And OECD membership was, against significant resistance from civil society groups, as planned achieved in December 1996. In his remarks to celebrate this the president promised that the government would increase its efforts "to further promote substantive change and reform in each field of national activity, while further broadening the scope of globalization" (*Ibid.*, p. 296). This would include a focus on trying to attract more FDI, and there was a slight increase in the net inflow of FDI reaching almost 0.6 percent of GDP during the Kim Young-sam's last full year (1997) in office (see Fig. 3). The government also as part of its globalization policy sought to significantly increase the international trade presence and the country did, as indicated by Fig. 4, see over the next years an increase in trade as a percentage of GDP.

However, while the rhetoric was extensive, and the number of reports outlining strategy was plentiful, and minor improvements in some areas had been achieved, due to the corruption charges against not only some of his secretaries, but also against his second oldest son, the president was already by mid-1995 increasingly turning into a lame duck.

Furthermore, while the South Korean economy in the years 1994 to 1997 did see an improvement in the growth rate, it would also by the early Summer of 1997 see the first of a series of large conglomerate bankruptcies, and throughout the Summer and Fall of that year the crisis deepened to such an extent that the Kim Young-sam government was forced to approach the IMF for a bailout. As part of the bailout a number of policy changes were required by the IMF, and while these requirements had a significant negative impact on the livelihood of many ordinary people, they might also have been a blessing in disguise for the *Segyehwa* project as they would give Kim Young-sam's successor, Kim Dae-jung, the needed coverage, and leverage, to push through the unfinished tasks of globalization by removing most existing barriers to economic liberalization, which the Kim Young-sam government had struggled to remove since the inauguration of the *Segyehwa* policy (Haggard et. al, 1999). Among the policy changes mandated by the IMF were allowing foreign ownership of land, merger and acquisitions of domestic enterprises by foreign corporations, and even hostile takeovers, which all had been strongly resisted by vested interests while Kim Young-sam was in office, and there continued to be resistance to some of the key policies of the *Segyehwa* project by anti-globalization groups in the country. These groups had, in particular, seen the pursuit of OECD membership before the country, in their opinion was ready, as reckless, and they worried about the fact that while the opening of the economy was progressing, the reforms in welfare, and the goal of achieving social justice, which were important parts of the Kim Young-sam government's *Segyehwa* policy, were left behind with dire consequences as the financial crisis struck in late 1997. That said, many of the changes demanded by the IMF, such as a restructuring of the financial sector, improvements in corporate governance, and a more flexible labor market, and which would be pursued by the incoming president, Kim Dae-jung, were in fact very similar to the policies that had been part of the *Segyehwa* project, but which the Kim Young-sam government had been unable to carry out due to the absence of public support.

While many of the economic goals that were part of the *Segyehwa* policy during Kim Young-sam's presidency failed to be comprehensively implemented a repeatedly emphasized important part of the *Segyehwa* objectives that did see success was the goal to significantly enhance the country's global position. This included a focus on increasing its presence in international organizations. South Korea first became a member of the United Nations in 1991, and by 1994 it was still only a member of twenty-seven international organizations. However, this push, initiated by the government, would see the country being a member of thirty-seven international organizations by the end of Kim Young-sam's last full year in office. Furthermore, while the South Korea had deployed five



Fig. 4. Trade as a Percentage of GDP. Source: <https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=2&country=KOR>. Accessed 5 August 2023.

observers to the UNTAC mission in Cambodia in July 1992 during the Roh Tae-woo government, there would be a significant increase in the country's participation in UNPKO missions during the Kim Young-sam presidency. South Korea would dispatch observers to the UNOMSA mission in South Africa (1994), to the ONUMOZ mission in Mozambique (1994), the UNOMIG mission in Georgia (1994), and the UNMOGIP mission in India (1994). In addition, troops would be deployed to the UNOSOM II mission in Somalia (1993 ~ 1994), to the MINURSO mission in Western Sahara (1994 ~ 2006), and the UNAVEM II mission in Angola (1995 ~ 1996).¹⁰ This move to expand the country's global presence by increasing the country's membership in international organizations, and participate in UN PKO missions, would be continued by the succeeding Kim Dae-jung government with the number of international organization that the country was a member of hitting forty-two in 2003.

Implementation during the Kim Dae-jung Government, 1998-03

In late December 1997 a reform package was finally pushed through the National Assembly. It established the Financial Supervisory Commission (FSC), liberalized foreign ownership of South Korean stocks, and also enforced the independence of the Bank of Korea. Under the slogan 'Parallel Development of Democracy and Market Economy' the incoming Kim Dae-jung government would use the bailout requirements enforced by the IMF as a cover to pursue many of the reforms envisioned under Kim Young-sam's *Segyehwa* policy, but which the Kim Young-sam government had failed in getting implemented due to widespread resistance within the bureaucracy and the business world.¹¹

While much of the focus was on dealing with the financial crisis, and improving the relationship with North Korea (the so-called Sunshine Policy), the Kim Dae-jung government did not abandon the Kim Young-sam's government's focus on globalization. In fact, the need for comprehensive changes in this "age of globalization" was mentioned in his inaugural speech.¹² Although it did abolish the Committee to Promote Globalization the Kim Dae-jung government did also embrace further financial liberalization and globalization as the only way for the country to escape the crisis, and for that the government saw a need for

an increase in foreign direct investment in a search for long-term financial stability.¹³ And South Korea did in the first two years of the the Kim Dae-jung government, as indicated by Fig. 5, see an increase in FDI.

Attracting FDI was an important part of the opening of the economy that was seen as essential in achieving a significant increase in the importance of the country's global presence, and it had been an important element of the *Segyehwa* policy of the Kim Young-sam government. It was also a key goal of the Kim Dae-jung government as it hoped that by shifting from the earlier heavy reliance on loans to FDI, it would be able to reduce the country's vulnerability to external shocks, ease the pressures of debt service, attract much needed new technologies, and also stimulate a move towards new corporate governance. And the country did in the immediate years after the IMF bailout see a number of major deals take place. For instance, the GM takeover of Daewoo after two years of negotiations in April 2002, Citigroup's acquisition of KorAm Bank in April 2004 (renamed Citibank), and Shanghai Automotive Industry Corp's takeover of Ssangyong Motors in October 2002. However, the data also indicates that with the exception of the immediate years after the financial bailout in 1997, FDI would reach a plateau in 1999 (see Fig. 5). This might have been influenced by the significant resistance against FDI from the large conglomerates, and from non-governmental groups, who were very critical of the way foreign corporations, in their opinion, took advantage of the dire financial situation in 1997–1998. However, the need to see an increase in FDI, and seeking more overseas markets for South Korean goods, led the Kim Dae-jung government in December 1999 to initiate negotiations on the country's first free trade agreement, and as Fig. 6 indicates, trade as a percentage of GDP would increase in 1999–2000, but then start to decline. However, during the first year of the Roh Mu-hyun government (2003–08) the country would start again to see an increase in trade as a percentage of GDP.

The first free trade agreement (FTA) negotiations were started in 1999 with Chile, and would be signed by the two countries in February 2003. It was partly the delay in settling the disputes that was part of the establishment of the World Trade Organization that led South Korea to seek the negotiations on free trade agreements. However, it would first be in 2004 that the agreement with Chile would be followed by free trade negotiations with another state (Singapore). In its continued emphasis on globalization the South Korean government held up Singapore as an example to emulate. In fact, the signing of the trade agreement between the two countries was by some seen as an opportunity to engage in a comprehensive analysis of which kind of

¹⁰ See <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors>. Accessed 28 July 2023.

¹¹ Kim Dae-jung had already in his *Daejung kyongjeron* [Mass-participatory Economy] (Seoul: Ch'eongsa, 1986) revealed many of his populist ideas for reform of the South Korean economy. The IMF mandated restructuring was later incorporated into government publications. See, for instance, Ministry of Finance and Economy (1998).

¹² See <https://shlel.tripod.com/krinaug.htm>. Accessed 29 July 2023.

¹³ It is significant that Kim Dae-jung mentioned both *Segyehwa* and the need for inducing FDI in his inauguration speech. See Kim (1998).

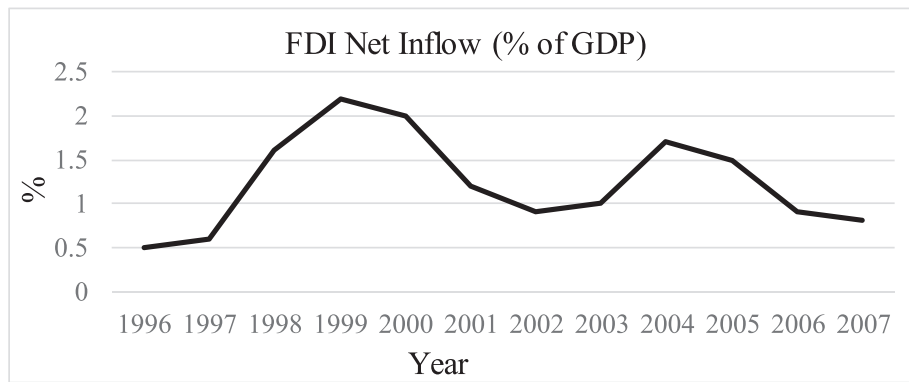


Fig. 5. Foreign Direct Investment (Net Flow of GDP), 1996–2007. Source: <https://data.worldbank.org/>. Accessed 29 July 2023.

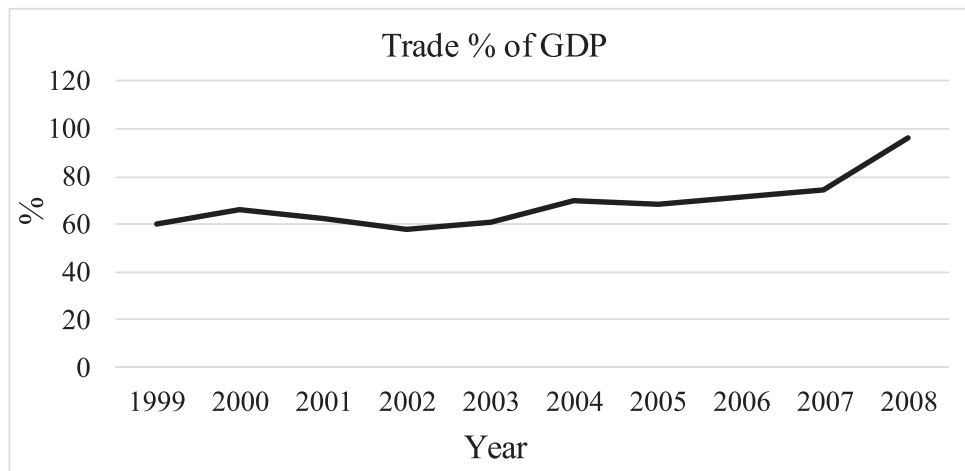


Fig. 6. Trade as a Percentage of GDP, 1999–2008. Source: <https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=2&country=KOR>. Accessed 2 August 2023.

globalization strategies and methods Singapore had used in successfully taking advantage of the ongoing globalization, and South Korea would soon start to initiate negotiations with several other countries on the establishment of FTAs. By 2021 South Korea would have ratified twenty-one FTAs (see Fig. 7), with currently (June 2023) thirteen negotiations ongoing. The most controversial of the signed FTAs was the agreement with the United States that was initiated in 2007 by the Roh Mu-hyun government that argued that an FTA with the U.S. “would raise Korea’s competitiveness vis-à-vis China and Japan” (quoted in Park,

1999, p. 459). The negotiations were very controversial, and opposed by labor unions and many civil society groups, and it would first be after four years of negotiations that the agreement was finally ratified by the two countries (Saxer, 2017). However, South Korea would, during the Moon Jae-in government (2017–22), be forced by the Donald Trump administration to engage in a significant revision of the agreement (Kriekhaus, 2018).

Within a few months after inauguration the Kim Dae-jung government succeeded in passing most of the economic reforms bills that had

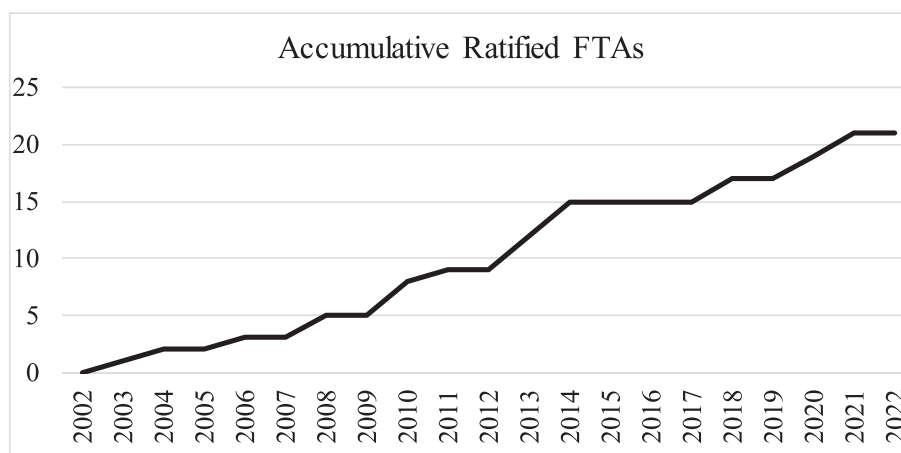


Fig. 7. Accumulative Ratified FTAs. Source: Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy. <https://www.fta.go.kr/main/>. Accessed 3 August 2023.

bugged down the Kim Young-sam government. Under a strategy of pursuing a parallel development of democracy and market economy the government not only sought to accelerate market liberalization, to deepen structural reforms, but also to enhance the democratization process. The government argued that “in an age of globalization, mercantilist notions based on the idea of an independent national economic have no place” (Ministry of Finance and Economy, 1998, p. 3). Hence, the Kim Dae-jung government fully embraced the *Segyehwa* project initiated by the previous government, and throughout his term in office President Kim Dae-jung would continue to promote, and emphasize, the necessity of the country opening up to the world. This was to be achieved through a “Second Nation Building” where all citizens were invited to “become active agents of national reform” by striving to “become a global citizen” (Kim, 1999). President Kim Dae-jung, as had Kim Young-sam, not only saw globalization as in no way restricted to the economy, but as happening in every area, and he also saw globalization as an opportunity for the country to join the ranks of first-rate societies. He was, however, aware of the need to make sure that the benefits, that in his opinion would accrue to the country due to globalization, would be shared among all citizens, and he recognized that the government would have to expand social welfare in order to mitigate the consequences of not only the 1997 crisis, but also of the ongoing campaign to globalize society.

To ensure public support, whose absence had played a significant role in the failure of the previous government to meet many of its *Segyehwa* goals, a Tripartite Commission of Labor, Business, and Government was established by the government in January 1998. The purpose of the commission was to initiate a social agreement on how not only to overcome the financial crisis, but also generate support for the mid-and-long term goals of the government. However, the government-led attempt at reaching a consensus failed as labor unions saw the burden of the crisis unfairly distributed, and relations between the government and the two major labor unions would become increasingly contentious as the unions began to see the emphasis on further globalization as a serious threat to the interests of the workers. It was not only the labor unions that were unhappy with the government approach to handling the crisis. A variety of other organized civil society groups responded to the crisis by mobilizing resources to help the poor and those disadvantaged by setting up soup kitchens and building shelters. In fact, as the country started to experience mass-unemployment, with government agencies unable to cope, the government was forced to ask civil society groups to implement many of the relief, and new-skills job training, programs that were initiated.

***Segyehwa* and the Roh & Lee Governments, 2003–2013**

The desire to strengthening the position of country, which had been initiated by Kim Young-sam, and continued by the Kim Dae-jung government, would also be pursued by President Ro Mu-hyun (2003–08). However, the foreign policy focus of the Roh government was more regional, in particular seeking to build upon the outgoing government’s attempt at improving the relationship with North Korea, but many of the globalization policies of the Kim Young-sam and Kim Dae-jung governments, focusing on economic and political factors, would also be continued by the Roh government. Emphasizing the increasing importance of Northeast Asia, Roh Mu-hyun in his inaugural speech in February 2003 stated that the country should seek to play a “pivotal role in the age of Northeast Asia in the 21st Century” in the region (Roh, 2003). In fact, the Roh government saw the further globalization of the country as the only option for a nation as dependent on trade as South Korea, and it established a Presidential Commission on Policy Planning that was put in charge of developing the necessary policies. The purpose was to take advantages of the opportunities that were the result of globalization with the ultimate goal being to become, in the words of the commission, a “leading world nation.” (Presidential Commission on Policy Planning, 2008, p. 128).

However, as the previous governments had, the Roh government would also find its options restricted by domestic concerns over the potential negative impact of a globalization policy. An example could be the opposition to a promise, given by the government during WTO membership negotiations, to liberalize the local rice market. An alliance of farmer unions and civil society groups saw the globalization of the rice market as threatening to the very fabric of South Korean society, and hence, actively opposed any concessions on the issue forcing the Roh government to change its policy. This change in policy would have a negative impact on foreign direct investment that in the first two years of the Roh government (2003–04) had seen an increase, as indicated by Fig. 5, but would then see a significant decline over the next years.

Lee Myung-bak, who won the presidential election in December 2007, had been promoting a policy during his campaign that saw an enhanced globalization policy as essential in achieving seven percent economic growth, raise the per capita income to US\$40,000, and make South Korea the seventh largest economy in the world (the so-called 7–4–7 goals). There clearly was some similarities with the objectives of the *Segyehwa* policy introduced by the Kim Young-sam government, and the goal of the Lee Myung-bak government to see South Korea becoming an advanced country. In contrast, however, to the more regional focus of the Kim Dae-jung and Roh Mu-hyun governments, the Lee Myung-bak government argued for the necessity of going beyond Northeast Asia, and one of the first moves by the government was the New Asia Initiative seeking to enhance the country’s diplomatic, and trade, relations with the ASEAN countries. This initiative was considered as essential in order for the country to reach the goal of becoming a “global economic power” by “making use of the currents of globalization.” (Presidential Commission on Policy Planning, 2008, pp. 98–101).

Another goal of the Lee government was to significantly increase access to foreign markets and during the Lee Myung-bak government, as indicated by Fig. 7, nine free trade agreements would be ratified, and the country would see an increase in the importance of trade as a percentage of GDP during the first three years of the Lee government, but then, as indicated by Fig. 8, a downward trend would again commence.

The Lee government recognized that it would have to go beyond a focus on economic issues, with the country increasingly expected also to contribute to international activities, and move past a “framework of a weak state diplomacy limited to the Korean peninsula and Northeast Asia” (*Ibid.*, p. 356). It was acknowledged that enhancing the international position of the country would entail an increase in international contributions which the government saw as “still lacking” (*Ibid.*, p. 355). One area of focus when it came to increasing the country’s international contributions was on overseas development aid. While there had been an increase in ODA during the early years of the Kim Young-sam government, as the financial crisis hit the country, ODA contributions declined and while we would see an increase again from 2001 ODA remained below 0.10 percent of GNI in the year (2008) the presidency of Lee Myung-bak began. However, as indicated by Fig. 9, we would during the Lee government see the beginning of a significant increase in ODA. That said, while this trend of an increase in ODA contribution has continued since the Lee government, South Korea still remains below the 0.33 percent of GNI that in 2021 was the average of the DAC member countries.

The focus on an increase in ODA was not the only way that the Lee government sought to enhance the country’s global position. The president had already in his inauguration speech in February 2008 declared that his government would seek to more actively participate in UN peacekeeping operations, and that it wanted its participation to go beyond the “declaratory level” that it argued the country’s participation had been until then (*Ibid.*). South Korea had already in early July 2007, while Roh Mu-hyun was president, deployed the first troops to the UNIFIL mission in Lebanon, and one factor in leading the Roh government to agree to the deployment of a combat unit to Lebanon, even in the face of significant domestic opposition, might have been that the former South Korean minister of foreign affairs, Ban Ki-moon, took

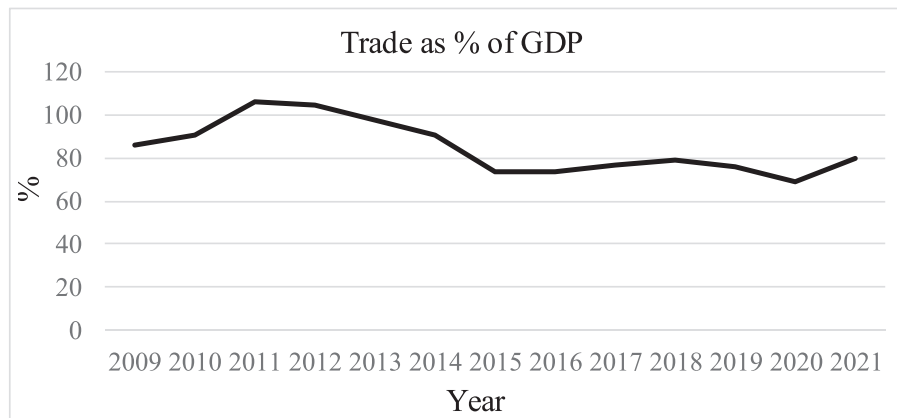


Fig. 8. Trade as a Percentage of GDP, 2009–2021. Source: <https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=2&country=KOR>. Accessed 3 August 2023.

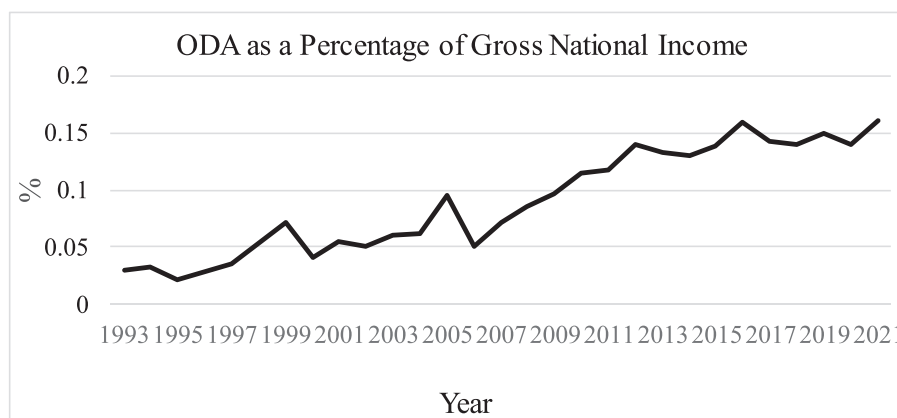


Fig. 9. ODA as a Percentage of GNI. Source: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/DT.ODA.ALLD.CD?locations=KR>. Accessed 2 August 2023.

office as UN secretary-general in January 2007. By late 2009 the Lee government had initiated a number of policies that would put in place the legal and institutional structure needed in order to see an increase in the country's participation in UN peacekeeping operations. Among these measures would be the earlier mentioned United Nations Peacekeeping Operations Participation Act that was passed by the National Assembly in December 2009 with the Lee government establishing a standing unit, the International Peace Support Force, which was ready for overseas deployment at a short notice. We have since then seen an increase in South Korean participation in UN Peacekeeping Operations with currently (April 2023) a total of 545 members of the South Korean military and police deployed to four different UN PKO missions.

Conclusion

The South Korean case clearly indicates that in contrast to Kenichi Ohmae's (1995) claim about the demise of the nation state in an era of globalization, that the state very much still can play a significant role in shaping a nation's reaction to globalization. Moreover, the analysis of the formulation and initiation of the *Segyehwa* policy also signals that the state have to acknowledge that globalization will have an impact on economic, social, cultural, and political factors taking this into account when policies dealing with the impact of globalization are considered. The *Segyehwa* (globalization) was initiated as a state-enhancing, top-down policy by the Kim Young-sam government in 1994. President Kim was not the only government leader in the 1990s who recognized the potential impact of globalization on the functions and future of the state. For instance, as mentioned above, the president of the Philippines at the time, Fidel V. Ramos, and the U.S. president, Bill Clinton, both explicitly

acknowledged not only the increased global interdependence that was a result of globalization, but also emphasized the need for the state to adapt to the changes caused by globalization.

Still, the South Korean case is rather exceptional, as the Kim Young-sam government sought not only to adapt to the forces of globalization, recognizing the potential impact on the state. In fact, its main goal was to seek a real transformation of both domestic and foreign policy enabling the country to join the club of advanced nations. However, while the rhetoric was extensive, many of the policies initiated were not followed through in a comprehensive and coherent way which, at least partially, might have been due to the financial crisis starting in the last year of Kim Young-sam's term in office. Nonetheless, while inheriting the financial crisis, President Kim Dae-jung, who succeeded Kim Young-sam, would also continue the focus on *Segyehwa* to enhance the global position of South Korea. In fact, this focus on globalization as a way of enhancing the global position of the country has continued to be part of the policies pursued by the governments, some of them having a more regional focus, over the last three decades. For instance, the policy of Global Korea pursued by Lee Myung-bak government saw, as the Roh Mu-hyun government before it had done, the need for using globalization to enhance the global position of the country not only when it came to economic factors, but also seeking to comprehensively increase the country's global diplomatic presence. This is also an important goal of the current (2023) government, with President Yoon Suk-yeol, seeking to turn South Korea into a global pivotal country which is very much a continuation of the basic idea of the *Segyehwa* policy formulated and initiated by the Kim Young-sam government in 1994.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Carl J. Saxer: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Resources.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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